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A MERCURY POROSIMETRY STUDY OF THE  
EVOLUTION OF POROSITY IN PORTLAND  
CEMENT

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BY

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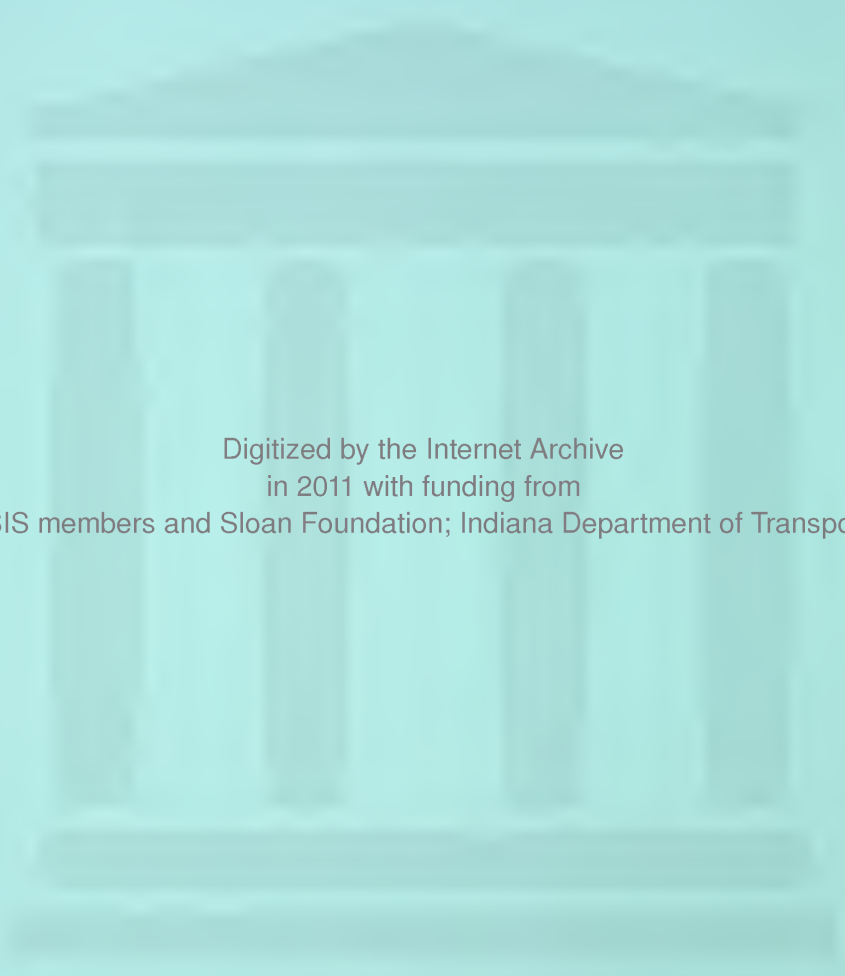
AND

S. DIAMOND

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A Mercury Porosimetry Study of the Evolution of Porosity in Portland Cement

To: J. F. McLaughlin, Director  
Joint Highway Research Project

4 November 1969

From: H. L. Michael, Associate Director  
Joint Highway Research Project

Project: C-36-61E

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The attached technical paper, "A Mercury Porosimetry Study of the Evolution of Porosity in Portland Cement" by D. N. Winslow and S. Diamond is derived from the Final Report on Phase I of the HPR Part II research project "Fundamental Studies in Portland Cement Concrete".

The paper reviews the mercury intrusion technique for measurement of pore size distribution in porous media, presents experimental results on such measurements in hydrated portland cement paste of various ages, and interprets the results in the form of a consistent picture of the development of microstructure as cement paste hydrates over a period of time.

The paper has been presented orally at the July 1969 meeting of the ASTM by Prof. Diamond. It is now presented to the Board for approval and for transmission to BPR and ISHC for review and approval for publication. It is proposed for publication by ASTM in the Journal of Materials.

Respectfully submitted,

*Harold L. Michael/wmo*

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HLM:pm

cc: JHRP Board



Technical Publication

A Mercury Porosimetry Study of the Evolution  
of Porosity in Portland Cement

by  
D. N. Winslow  
and  
S. Diamond

Joint Highway Research Project

Project: C-36-61E  
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## ABSTRACT

The pore-size distribution of two hydration series of cement pastes prepared at water:cement ratios of 0.4 and 0.6 was determined as a function of age using mercury porosimetry. The contact angle of mercury on thoroughly dried paste was measured as  $117^{\circ}$ ; for "p"-dried paste it was found to be  $130^{\circ}$ . It was found that much of the pore space present at all ages occurred in pores between  $0.1\ \mu$  and  $0.01\ \mu$ ; that is, in between the conventional notions of "capillary" and "gel" pore diameters. It was further observed that pore volume left unintruded by mercury at 15,000 psi was significantly less than the 28 percent by volume that should be present in mature pastes according to current notions of the nature of cement gel. On the basis of these observations and direct examination of fracture surfaces of cement paste it was concluded that most of the space present is neither conventional "capillary" nor conventional "gel" space but merely space between fine individual particles of cement hydration products.

## Key Words

Cement paste, mercury porosimetry, capillary pores, gel pores, concrete, Portland cement, cement hydration, pore-size distribution, contact angle





## INTRODUCTION

Notions of the microstructure of portland cement paste derived mostly from the postulations of T. C. Powers and co-workers as extended by various workers are coming increasingly into question as data based on new investigative techniques are reported. One of the most fundamental of these notions is that in hydrating cement paste two distinct kinds of pores were presumed to be present: "capillary" pores which represent remnants of intergranular space left unfilled by the various products of cement hydration (lime, calcium silicate hydrate gel, hydrated calcium sulfoaluminates, etc.), and "gel" pores. The latter were presumed to be a characteristic feature inherent in the nature of hydrated cement paste, occupying approximately 28 percent of its volume, and according to Powers' 1960 estimate (1), having a width of the order of 18 Å. Powers also suggests in the same review paper that capillary pores are "generally orders of magnitude larger than gel pores, even in mature paste.

Direct examination of cement paste by scanning electron microscopy (2,3,4) suggests that cement paste is, in fact, largely a particulate system composed of primary particles of various shapes and sizes, but with characteristic dimensions of the order of 0.1 micron to a few microns. Examination of fracture surfaces at high magnification also discloses that spaces ('pores') of the order of a small fraction of a micron are present between the



primary particles of cement hydration products. Figure 1 shows a typical example. In addition, often a portion of the hydrated paste is seen to consist of reticular, spongy areas with visible holes or discontinuities of the order of 0.1 micron or less in diameter. An example of this is shown in Figure 2.

In consequence of these observations, it would seem that a more realistic idea of the pore structure of hydrated cement paste needs to include recognition of such pores intermediate in size between conventional notions of capillary and gel pores. Further, if a significant content of such intermediate pores occurs in mature paste, the volume of gel pores present might be less than the 28 percent conventionally estimated, perhaps significantly less.

The present work represents an attempt to explore and evaluate the content of pores of various size ranges in a series of portland cement pastes of increasing age prepared from a single cement. The focus of the problem is to secure a valid pore-size distribution curve, not only for a given paste, but for pastes representing the whole process of cement hydration. In this way some notion of the origin and changes undergone by the micro-structural features of the paste might be developed.

The method chosen was that of mercury porosimetry. This procedure, while suffering from certain arbitrary assumptions that will be discussed later, represents the most nearly direct assay of pore sizes available at the present time. Alternate techniques, such as those involving capillary condensation, involve assumptions



that in fact are quite difficult to fulfill in cement paste studies.

#### HYDRATION OF CEMENT PASTE

The cement used throughout was a commercial Type I cement of Blaine fineness of  $3380 \text{ cm}^2/\text{g}$  with a composition of 51 percent  $\text{C}_3\text{S}$ , 24 percent  $\text{C}_2\text{S}$ , 11 percent  $\text{C}_3\text{A}$  and 6 percent  $\text{C}_4\text{AF}$  calculated according to the Bogue method. Analysis disclosed a gypsum content of 4.1 percent as  $\text{CaSO}_4$ , a free lime content of 0.72 percent and a total alkali content of 0.38 percent as  $\text{Na}_2\text{O}$ .

All mixing and curing operations were carried out at room temperature, approximately  $24^\circ\text{C}$ , in an air-conditioned laboratory.

Mixing was done in vacuo in a specially made cylindrical plastic mixer, which was loaded with several steel rods and flint balls and a standard charge of 1000 g of cement, and then evacuated. Water was added through a valve without breaking the vacuum, and the mixer then alternately rolled on an electric roller at 100 rpm and shaken by hand, according to a preset schedule for a total of 25 minutes. The vacuum was then released and the paste placed into 12-ml polypropylene test tubes by rodding in three layers on a vibrating table. A tight fitting stopper was then positioned so that no free volume was left above the paste and vibration continued with frequent reversal of top and bottom according to a preset schedule. The samples were then stored (stoppered) in a fog room for 24 hours, demolded directly into saturated limewater, and allowed to hydrate continuously until the desired age was attained.



Checks of density confirmed essentially complete uniformity within each cylinder except for the top and bottom ends; in practice, specimens for analysis were taken only from the middle one third of each cylinder and the outer two thirds discarded.

Two series of pastes were made, one at a water:cement ratio of 0.6, the other at 0.4. Approximately 320 individual cylinders were prepared for this work, and pore-size distributions were run on approximately 80 of them.

Considerable preliminary work was done to determine the most appropriate drying technique, since it is necessary to begin a mercury porosimeter run with all of the sample pores vacant. As the result of a number of comparisons of the results of various standard methods of drying ("P-drying" over a mixture of magnesium perchlorate hydrates, "D-drying" over a dry ice trap, and oven drying at 105°C) the oven-drying procedure was selected as the standard procedure. A discussion of these experimental comparisons is given subsequently in this paper. All samples tested for pore-size distribution were oven dried, broken into pieces of the order of one gram in weight, and then tested in the bulk condition, i.e. not ground to a powder.

#### DETAILS OF THE DETERMINATION OF PORE-SIZE DISTRIBUTION BY MERCURY POROSIMETRY

##### Theory

A non-wetting liquid (i.e. one forming a contact angle with a given solid greater than 90°) will intrude open pores of the





solid only under applied pressure. The pressure required is a function of the contact angle, the surface energy of the liquid, and the geometry of the pores. For the case of cylindrical pores the relation given by Washburn (5) is:

$$P = \frac{-4 \gamma \cos \theta}{d} \quad (1)$$

where:  $P$  = pressure required to intrude pore  
 $d$  = diameter of intruded pore  
 $\gamma$  = surface energy of the liquid  
 $\theta$  = contact angle between liquid and pore wall

Mercury is almost always used as the liquid as it has a number of practical advantages including low vapor pressure, relative inertness in terms of chemical reactivity, and the fact that it is normally non-wetting for most kinds of surfaces.

The practical upper limit of pore diameters measurable by mercury porosimetry may be extended to about 1000 microns or more by appropriate techniques; the lower limit is usually set by the pressuring capacity of the instrument although considerable uncertainty accompanies the use of very high pressures corresponding to pores of only a few molecular diameters. In the present work the upper limit of measurement was taken to 200 microns, although for most pastes very little pore space was found for diameters larger than 10 microns. The lower diameter limit was set by the pressuring capacity of the instrument used, approximately 15,000 psi, and corresponds to about 82 Å (0.0082 microns) for oven dried paste.



There are certain limitations inherent in the mercury pore-size distribution technique. At the outset of a mercury intrusion determination the sample is surrounded by mercury; as pressuring proceeds, mercury flows from the surface of the sample towards its center through whatever pores are available to it. If the path mercury must follow to reach a particular internal pore is smaller in diameter than the internal pore itself, that pore will be intruded only after sufficient pressure is applied to intrude the narrower pathway. Thus, fundamentally, pores accessible only through restricted entryways are tallied as part of the diameter class of the entryways. Since entryways narrower than 82 Å could not be intruded in this work due to the pressure limitation, pores of any size connected to the exterior only by entryways narrower than 82 Å will not have been measured. Finally, isolated pores having no communication with the exterior of the sample cannot be measured in any event, regardless of the pressure used.

#### Apparatus

The instrument used to measure mercury intrusion was an American Instrument Co. unit (Catalogue No. 5-7121) with an operating pressure maximum of 15,000 psi, modified in certain respects. The porosimeter consists essentially of a means of generating pressure to cause intrusion and a means of measuring the volume of mercury intruded. We found that the electric motor which drove the pressure generator caused the porosimeter to heat up during use, thus affecting the measurement of the intruded mercury. To avoid this we removed the back of the



instrument cabinet and relocated the electric motor some distance away. The portion of the equipment used to measure coarse pores (the "filling device") was discarded and replaced by a unit of advanced design (U. S. Patent No. 3,438,245, Prado Laboratory, Inc., Cleveland, Ohio). With the modified unit, the filling device and sample holder (a dilatometer-like vessel called a penetrometer) are maintained in a horizontal position during all filling and measurement operations, thus permitting operation substantially free of any pressure applied by the weight of superposed mercury, and extending the upper limit of the range of diameters measurable from about 100 microns to about 1000 microns.

#### Corrections For Intrusion Data

The basic data recorded in mercury porosimetry consist of a series of measurements of increasing absolute pressures on the mercury and corresponding cumulative volumes of mercury intruded. The apparent volume of intruded mercury that is read at each pressure step must be corrected for several different effects:

- 1) The residual air remaining in the penetrometer after evacuation is trapped during the initial mercury filling step, and is compressed progressively to increasingly small volumes as pressure increases. The change in volume due to compression of air must be subtracted from the gross intruded volume of mercury at each step. Since initial pressure and volume are known, Boyle's Law can be used to calculate the required corrections, which in the present work total about  $0.001 \text{ cm}^3$ .



- 2) The mercury is being compressed as the pressure is increased. The required correction is much less than the absolute loss in volume of the liquid as calculated from its compressibility per se, as the penetrometer containing the mercury is also being compressed at the same time. Correction is made by measuring the effect of pressuring in the same penetrometer filled with mercury only, i.e. without any sample being present. In the present work, the maximum correction was of the order of  $0.6065 \text{ cm}^3$  at 15,000 psi.

The compressibility of the sample should also require a small correction, but no means of ascertaining the absolute compressibility of the solid part of cement paste was available. Handbook values of the compressibilities of most reasonably strong solids suggest that the volume change from 0 to 15,000 psi would in fact be negligible with respect to the volume of mercury intruded into cement paste.

It should be noted that upon compression, mercury heats up. The temperature increase causes expansion, which tends to mask some of the compression and it is necessary to allow the mercury to return to its original temperature to truly measure the compression. In fact, rapid pressuring to 15,000 psi resulted in sufficient heat to mask more than 50 percent of the true compression and a pause of about 15 min was found to be required to allow the mercury to return to its starting temperature. This same effect operates during normal intrusion measurements also and must be taken into account.

#### Measurement of Contact Angle

In the absence in the available literature of any specific contact angle measurements for mercury on cement paste, a series





of measurements were carried out to determine this quantity. The technique chosen was one which provides the most directly applicable measurement for the purpose in hand, and consists of a direct measurement of the pressure required to intrude cylindrical pores of an accurately known diameter. With the diameter and pressure known, the factor  $4 \gamma \cos \theta$  is calculated directly from Equation 1, and assuming the well-established value for  $\gamma$ , (6,7) of 484 dynes/cm,  $\theta$  follows immediately. In point of fact, it is not strictly necessary to calculate  $\theta$  itself, since the factor  $4 \gamma \cos \theta$  required for interpreting the mercury intrusion data is directly available from the experimental measurement.

The measurements were performed on a 267-day old cement paste of the 0.4 water:cement ratio series. A disk of paste about the size and shape of a dime was cut from the cement paste cylinder using a precision lathe and saturated limewater as the only lubricant, and a series of 40 holes were drilled through the disk using a No. 92 twist drill, again with limewater as the lubricant. Both surfaces of the disk were examined under an optical microscope to confirm the circularity of the cross-sections of the drilled cylindrical pores and individual measurements of the diameter of each pore were made. The average diameter was 201.5 microns; most of the diameter measurements fell between 190 and 210 microns. The disk was then carefully "P-dried" over the appropriate mixture of magnesium perchlorate hydrates (8), and then subjected to mercury intrusion, the pressuring being carried only slightly beyond that necessary to intrude the drilled pores. The mercury



spontaneously flowed out of the pores on reducing the pressure, so that repeated measurements could be made. These were found to be quite reproducible. Subsequently, the same sample was oven dried at  $105^{\circ}\text{C}$  and the intrusion measurements repeated in the oven-dried condition. The pressure and intrusion data are given in Figure 3.

The measurements indicate a contact angle of  $130^{\circ}$  for the "P-dried" paste, but a contact angle of only  $117^{\circ}$  for the oven-dried paste. The relationship between pressure and pore diameter (Equation 1) involves the cosine of the contact angle; thus, the  $13^{\circ}$  difference in contact angle corresponds to a 30 percent drop in the value of the cosine, and hence, in the diameter intruded at a given pressure.

It is generally considered that "P-dried" pastes do, in fact, contain some residual surface water, and the reduction in contact angle on more complete dehydration of the surface on oven drying is in line with similar changes reported on glass and other substances (9). Thus, the value of  $117^{\circ}$  has been used in calculating pore diameters for all of the cement pastes discussed in this paper, all of which were oven dried prior to mercury intrusion.

#### Effects of Sample Drying

In preliminary studies, companion samples of cement pastes were dried by each of the three drying procedures in common use for cement paste: equilibration over magnesium perchlorates ("P-drying"), evacuation over a dry-ice trap ("D-drying") (10), and oven drying at  $105^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The methods are given in order of increasing severity of water removal, the equilibrium vapor pressures being



8  $\mu\text{Hg}$  (11), and 0.5  $\mu\text{Hg}$ , respectively, for the first two methods. The pressuring curves for the companion samples had similar shapes. Use of the measured contact angles for "P"- and oven-dried samples to interpret the data resulted in pore-size distribution curves like those of Figure 4, in which it is seen that the data in the coarse pore region roughly coincide, but that the extent of pore space in diameter classes smaller than about 1000 Å seems to be a direct function of the rigor of the drying treatment. Data for the "D-dried" condition fall in between the plots for the "P-dried" and the oven-dried pastes, and are more nearly like the former. An assumed contact angle of  $126^\circ$  was used in the absence of a measured value for this drying condition. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the very small differences in residual water retained at equilibrium with respect to the different drying treatments are in some way responsible not only for the changed contact angle but also the relatively large change in apparent mercury pore-size distribution in the fine-pore region. That this phenomenon is not associated with microcracking or other irreversible changes accompanying the more rigorous drying procedures is shown by the experimental fact that the change is reversible. If a sample is dried to weight equilibrium by any of the three techniques, resaturated, and then redried by another technique, it will exhibit essentially the same pore-size distribution to mercury as if it had originally been dried by the second technique. Data illustrating this observation are given in Figure 5. Observation of these pastes by scanning electron microscopy did not disclose any evidence for



microcracking in the size range concerned, thus confirming that differential microcracking associated with differences in drying procedure is not the cause of the differing pore-size distributions.

As mentioned earlier, oven drying was finally selected as the standard technique for characterizing the pore-size distributions of the pastes, largely on the assumption that the more complete removal of water prior to the intrusion of mercury probably provides a truer assessment of the actual pore spaces present.

#### Possible Influence of Carbonation

Some minimum exposure to the atmosphere being unavoidable, it was thought desirable to check the possible effects of carbonation on measured pore-size distributions. Samples were deliberately exposed to the atmosphere in an intermediate condition of dryness for about three weeks to insure maximum opportunity for carbonation to take place, and were then dried and tested in the normal manner. No difference was found in the resulting pore-size distributions as compared with replicate samples that had only minimum possible exposure to the atmosphere, and it was concluded that exposure to the atmosphere did not influence the pore-size distributions obtained in this work.

## RESULTS

#### Presentation of Data

The experimental pore-size distribution data in this work are presented in the form of cumulative pore-size distribution curves,





the pore volume parameter being expressed as  $\text{cm}^3$  of pore space per oven-dry gram of cement paste. The volumes are accumulated from the largest diameter pore measured to the smallest, the order in which the pores are physically intruded by the mercury. To retain the normal sense of the logarithmic scale of the abscissa, the cumulation curve proceeds from lower right to upper left.

In presenting pore-size distribution data for limited ranges of pore sizes many authors, particularly those who report results from capillary condensation measurements, prefer to plot the derivative distribution function,  $d(\text{volume})/d(\text{diameter})$ , rather than the cumulative or integral volume function. Unfortunately, the derivative presentation is severely distorted for data covering several orders of magnitude and vastly overemphasizes the apparent importance of the finest pore sizes at the expense of the coarser sizes. Further, the integral function used here has the distinct advantage that the fraction of pore space between any arbitrary bounds of pore diameters can be assessed at a glance.

Pore measurements were originally made starting from a diameter of several hundred microns, but it became apparent that even the youngest pastes tested showed negligible intrusion for diameters greater than 10 microns; the figures thus begin at that diameter. The minimum pore diameter intruded was approximately 82 Å.

In general, two replicate tests were conducted on a particular paste, and in some cases three or four. Repeatability was excellent, as seen in the figures presented.

#### Degree of Hydration, Total Pore Volume, and Pore Volume Intruded

Table 1 presents a summary of the samples employed, in terms of water:cement ratio and age at testing. Tests were conducted



on 0.4 and 0.6 water:cement ratio pastes hydrated continuously for periods ranging from one day to approximately eleven months.

The percentage of hydration recorded in Table 1 was obtained simply as the ratio of the non-evaporable water (after oven drying) of each paste at the stage concerned to that of a fully hydrated product of the same cement hydrated for many months in a ball mill.

The total pore volume present in each paste at the stage concerned was calculated in the following manner: First, the bouyant weight (in water) of each paste in the saturated condition was determined immediately on achievement of the required age; the paste specimen was then oven dried, weighed, and the density of solid matter calculated. The volume of solids was then calculated from the weight and the density. The bulk volume of the oven-dried sample was then determined by displacement of mercury, and the difference between bulk volume and solid volume was taken as the total pore space present and this was assessed as volume per dry gram of the paste. This procedure assumes that the density of water within the pores of the initially saturated specimen is the same as that of ordinary water. If, as has been suggested on the basis of indirect experiments (11), part of the water that is in the finest pores or most closely associated with the surface has a higher density, the density of solid matter will be correspondingly overestimated, and the pore space figure will be too low. The values calculated for the pastes are, in fact, quite reasonable and one would not expect this to be a major effect.

Table 1 also contains, for each paste, the total volume of mercury intruded into each sample. This is in all cases less than



the calculated volume of pore space. This is not surprising since pores having nominal diameters smaller than 82 A and pores penetrable only through necks smaller than 82 A cannot be recorded by the instrumentation employed. What is significant is that even for quite mature 0.4 water:cement ratio pastes, half or more of the pore space can in fact be intruded, i.e. consists of pores with nominal diameters significantly larger than the size range commonly associated with gel pores. This point will be discussed subsequently and its implications assessed.

Finally, the pore space calculated to be present, but not intruded by mercury up to the pressuring limitation corresponding to 82 A diameter is re-expressed as a percentage of the bulk volume occupied by the system. This percentage constitutes essentially an upper-bound estimate of the volume fraction of the finest class of pores present, i.e. those pores that would be assessed as "gel" pores on the basis of the prevailing model. It is an upper-bound estimate because it includes the volume of pores with diameters greater than 82 A but available to mercury only through constrictions smaller than this, and also any pores that happen to be completely isolated. According to the estimates of Powers (12), a fully hydrated paste of water:cement ratio larger than that required to provide room for complete hydration (i.e. larger than 0.38) should have a content of gel pores of 28 percent by volume. The figures in the last column of Table 1 reveal that for the oldest of the pastes tested (which are 80 percent and 86 percent hydrated, according to our estimates) there is an upper bound estimate of about 18 percent by volume in pores not intruded by mercury, i.e.



seemingly finer than 82 A in diameter. This upper bound estimate is much less than the volume of gel pores that would be present according to Powers. Furthermore, the data do not suggest that further increments of hydration associated with increasing age would lead to any major increase in the experimental value.

#### Characteristics of the Distribution Curves

Figure 6 presents the cumulative pore-size distribution curves for the series of 0.6 water:cement ratio pastes hydrated for periods of 1,2,3,5,7,28,59, and 318 days, respectively. A similar set of results is presented in Figure 7 for the corresponding 0.4 water:cement ratio pastes.

The following observations may be made on examining the general form and appearance of the curves:

1. The general distribution shifts to the left with increasing age; that is, the pores become increasingly finer with age.
2. The total pore volume intruded decreases with increasing age.
3. All of the curves display an apparent "threshold diameter", above which there is comparatively little intrusion into the paste, and immediately below which the greatest portion of the intrusion commences. The threshold diameter decreases steadily with age.
4. At any given age both the total intruded pore space and the threshold diameter are significantly larger for the 0.6 water:cement ratio paste than for the corresponding 0.4 water:cement ratio paste.
5. To a surprising degree the overall shapes of the distribution curves as plotted on a logarithmic diameter scale





are similar to each other. The only significant exception to this statement is the fact that the mature (28 days or older) 0.6 pastes show cumulative distribution curves that are approximately linear with the log of the diameter, while the corresponding curves for the 0.4 pastes tend to flatten out below about 300 A.

These general observations are now discussed in detail.

#### Decrease in Overall Pore Size with Age

This general observation is entirely in accord with ordinary expectation, based either on the Powers model or the simple observation that the hydration products of cement are, in general, significantly finer in particle size than the original cement grains. In consequence, one expects that the residual spaces present decrease as the content of hydration products increases with increasing age.

Figure 8 documents this trend quantitatively, by plotting the volume-average pore diameter as a function of age for each of the two water:cement ratio series. For almost all of the pastes the intrusion measured was greater than half the total pore space; thus, the volume-average pore diameter can be calculated without knowledge of the distribution of remaining fine pore sizes not tallied. In each case the diameter cited is an underestimate to the extent that "ink bottle" pores influence the observed distribution. The average diameters for day-old pastes, about 3000 and 1200 A respectively for the 0.6 and 0.4 pastes, drop rapidly to less than 300 A by a week of hydration; then drop much more slowly to values of the order of 100 A.



### Decrease of Intruded Pore Volume with Age

Again, such a result should be expected both on the basis of the Powers model of hydration and on the general notion that the hydration products occupy more volume than that occupied by the cement grains they replace. Quantitatively, as seen from Table 1, intrusion drops from about  $0.36 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$  for 1 day old paste to about  $0.19 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$  for 318 day old paste of 0.6 water:cement ratio; the corresponding figures for the 0.4 pastes are 0.27 and  $0.10 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$ , respectively.

### Threshold Diameter and Its Significance

The decrease of the previously defined "threshold diameter", with age is documented in Figure 9. The pattern of decrease is somewhat similar to that for mean diameter as a function of age (Figure 8) but naturally the threshold diameters are much larger for a given age. Beyond seven days the threshold diameter, like the volume-average diameter, ceases to decrease very rapidly.

The significance to be attributed to the threshold diameter is not immediately apparent, and some additional experiment was helpful in its interpretation. Samples of paste were pressured to pressures just less than, and also slightly greater than, the pressure corresponding to the threshold diameter. The samples were then depressurized, broken open, and fracture surfaces examined in an optical microscope. The total intrusion that had taken place was slight, in either case, compared to the total intrusion possible for the sample at high pressures. Nevertheless, significant differences were noted in the color and in the appearance



of the samples under the microscope. The color of the sample intruded to less than the threshold diameter was light gray; microscopic examination disclosed localized "streams" of mercury along the fractured cross-section of the interior, but also many local regions were present within the microscope field with little observable evidence of penetration by mercury. In contrast, the sample pressured to just beyond the threshold value was dark gray in color; examination under the optical microscope revealed the presence of darkened areas and droplets of exuding mercury uniformly spaced over all regions of the fracture surface. Macrophotographs of an unintruded paste specimen and specimens intruded to just below and just above the threshold diameter are given in Figure 10.

Additional information bearing on the nature of the threshold diameter had to do with the time required to reach equilibrium in a given increment of intrusion of mercury. It was noted that a drastic slowing down of the rate of penetration of mercury seemed to take place while making intrusion measurements near the threshold diameter. A series of special runs were made in which the time to reach equilibrium was noted at each pressuring step. Typical results of such determinations are given in Figure 11. The data are plotted in terms of the equilibration time per unit volume intruded, i.e. an inverse rate of penetration, vs. nominal diameter. Data are given for 2 day old and 318 day old pastes of both water:cement ratios. It is clear that at the threshold diameter, the rate of penetration of mercury is exceedingly slow compared to the rate both for intrusion into the coarser pores



and for intrusion into the bulk of the pore space in pores finer than the threshold diameter.

These observations are interpreted in the following manner. It is considered that the threshold diameter represents the minimum diameter of pores which are geometrically continuous throughout all regions of the hydrated cement paste. Some pores of diameter larger than this are present and available to the exterior, especially for the 0.6 pastes; but the volume of such easily available coarse pores is small and they are easily intruded from the exterior of the specimen. Pores larger than the threshold diameter, but available to the outside only through the continuous pore system, are likely also present to some extent. As the pressure corresponding to this characteristic diameter is reached, mercury begins to flow into new regions of the sample from the exterior of the paste. This flow presumably follows a long, tortuous path, and since essentially all of the mercury has to flow into the paste from new locations at or near the exterior, the process is correspondingly slow. Finally, perhaps at a pressure slightly in excess of that corresponding to the initial slowing down, the geometrically continuous channel system leading through all microregions of the paste is filled. Further intrusion (and by far the greater portion of the pore space has yet to be intruded) comes about through a process of filling what must be local side-channels and pores of finer and finer diameter from mercury already in the continuous channels. This filling of secondary pores, constituting the bulk of the pore system, is again rapid, since





flow paths are short. Thus the pore system of cement paste is visualized as constituting a geometrical system analagous in some respects to a finely branched river system with the relatively large pores intruded at the threshold diameter corresponding to the major rivers flowing through a geographical region, and the rest of the pores corresponding to local branch streams. The intrusion process corresponds, of course, not to drainage but to a hypothetical reverse flow from the river mouths.

The phenomenon of slow intrusion at a threshold diameter has been observed by N. M. Winslow of Prado Laboratories for a large number of other types of porous materials (private communication).

#### Influence of Water:Cement Ratio

As noted, and again in accord with all reasonable expectation, all of the parameters describing porosity are larger for the 0.6 water:cement ratio pastes than for the 0.4 water:cement ratio pastes of the same age.

What appears to be of some significance to the writers is the fact that the parameters, in general, are not so very much greater for the 0.6 as compared to the 0.4 pastes. For example, the threshold diameters of Figure 9, the volume-average pore diameters of Figure 8, and the general appearance and location of the cumulative curves of Figures 6 and 7, indicate that the pores of the 0.6 paste series are, as the pastes age, not really different in general size range than those of the 0.4 paste, especially after the first day. This is not at all in accord



with the notions of hydration formally encompassed in the Powers model, on the basis of which one would envision that the excess capillary space available at all stages for the 0.6 paste should remain in very large pores commensurate in size with the original pores present at the time of set.

#### General Pattern of the Pore-Size Distribution Curves

The approximately similar shapes of the pore-size distribution curves with aging do not lend support to the notion that the hydration process consists of replacing large units of capillary space with more or less single sized pores of a characteristic and very fine diameter. Rather it appears to the writers to be indicative of a general and continuing process of subdivision of pores.

In this context, the evolution with time of the intermediate size class of pores is instructive. For example, if one examines the apparent content of pores between arbitrary boundaries of  $0.1 \mu$  (1000 A) and  $0.01 \mu$  (100 A), one finds a gradual increase at first, then a gradual decrease as the general porosity becomes finer. For the 0.6 series, the apparent content of pores between these size boundaries is  $0.080 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$  at one day, increasing to about  $0.175 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$  at 28 days, and then decreasing slightly to about  $0.160 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$ . Corresponding figures for the 0.4 series are  $0.085 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$  at one day, increasing to about  $0.150 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$  at seven days, and then decreasing gradually to about  $0.100 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$ . Thus, it may be argued that the reduction in pore size with age is not accomplished by replacing large ("capillary")



pores with very fine ("gel") pores without regard to intermediate sizes, as conventional formulations would imply, but rather one of continuous narrowing of pores as particulate hydration products are laid down. In such a process the content of intermediate-sized pores would be expected to increase as the coarse pores are initially subdivided, and then gradually decrease as spaces between grains of hydration products grow finer and finer; this is exactly what seems to happen.

### CONCLUSIONS

1. Mercury intrusion of dried cement paste supplies a reproducible and apparently satisfactory direct method for the assessment of pore-size distributions, provided due caution is displayed in experimental details, in insuring completeness of water removal by rigorous drying, and in use of a realistic contact angle value. Due regard should be paid to the possible existence of ink-bottle pores, isolated pores, and to the deficiency of the pore shape model.
2. Direct measurements confirm the general concept that as a paste hydrates the total pore volume decreases and a general reduction in pore sizes takes place.
3. The measurements are in contradiction to specific notions of the nature of cement paste generally accepted. The content of pores finer than 82 Å as estimated by difference between intruded volume and total volume is significantly less than the volume of "gel" pores assumed to be present on the basis of cement models. The content of pores between  $0.1\ \mu$  and  $0.01\ \mu$ ,



"in-between" capillary and gel pore sizes by current notions, is found to be very substantial at all ages.

4. The evidence points toward a notion that most of the volume in cement paste is neither "capillary" porosity nor "gel" porosity per se, but largely consists of spaces left between particulate hydration products, perhaps supplemented by pores on apparently spongy hydration products occasionally found to be present in scanning electron microscope observation.
5. The existence of a "threshold diameter" for mercury intrusion in paste is noted; and its regular decrease with age documented. It is associated with very slow intrusion and with a qualitative difference in completeness of penetration of mercury to all general regions of the sample. It is concluded that the threshold diameter corresponds approximately to the minimum diameter of channels that are essentially continuous through the paste at a given age.

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Table I  
Summary of Pore Volume Data

Water: Cement Ratio	Age (days)	Degree of Hydration (%)	Calculated Total Pore Volume (cm <sup>3</sup> /g)	Pore Volume Intruded Volume (cm <sup>3</sup> /g)	% of Total Calculated Pore Volume	Volume (cm <sup>3</sup> /g)	% of Total Calculated Pore Volume	Pore Volume Not Intruded	% of Bulk Volume
0.4	1	38.0	0.323	0.266	82	0.057	18	8.6	
0.4	2	45.7	0.298	0.231	77	0.067	23	10.4	
0.4	3	52.9	0.279	0.194	70	0.085	30	13.3	
0.4	5	59.5	0.265	0.182	69	0.083	31	13.2	
0.4	7	62.8	0.260	0.175	67	0.085	33	13.6	
0.4	28	72.4	0.231	0.151	65	0.080	35	13.3	
0.4	60	75.3	0.218	0.109	50	0.109	50	18.4	
0.4	320	80.1	0.209	0.100	48	0.109	52	18.6	
0.6	1	39.6	0.412	0.360	87	0.052	13	6.9	
0.6	2	50.2	0.391	0.327	84	0.064	16	8.6	
0.6	3	53.2	0.373	0.300	80	0.073	20	10.0	
0.6	5	61.5	0.365	0.272	75	0.093	25	12.8	
0.6	7	65.4	0.360	0.249	69	0.111	31	15.5	
0.6	28	76.5	0.337	0.226	67	0.111	33	16.0	
0.6	59	80.7	0.323	0.204	63	0.119	37	17.3	
0.6	318	86.4	0.306	0.187	61	0.119	39	17.5	



## Legends for Figures

- Figure 1      Scanning electron micrograph of cement paste fracture surface, water:cement ratio 0.6, hydrated 7 days, showing sub-micron pore space.
- Figure 2      Scanning electron micrograph of cement paste fracture surface, water:cement ratio 0.6, hydrated 7 days, showing reticular spongy area between lime crystals.
- Figure 3      Mercury intrusion data for cement paste disk used for measurements of contact angle.
- Figure 4      Influence of sample drying procedure on measured pore size distribution. Cement paste has water:cement ratio of 0.4, hydrated 158 days.
- Figure 5      Pore size distribution measurements illustrating reversibility of drying effect. Cement paste has water:cement ratio of 0.4, hydrated 158 days.
- Figure 6      Pore size distributions of water:cement ratio 0.6 cement pastes hydrated for various ages.
- Figure 7      Pore size distributions of water:cement ratio 0.4 cement pastes hydrated for various ages.
- Figure 8      Mean pore diameters as functions of age for two water:cement ratios.
- Figure 9      "Threshold diameters" as functions of age for two water:cement ratios.
- Figure 10     Fracture surfaces of cement paste. Top; unintruded. Center; intruded to diameter just larger than "threshold diameter". Bottom; intruded to diameter just smaller than "threshold diameter".
- Figure 11     Inverse rate of mercury intrusion as a function of pore diameter for mature cement pastes.









